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THE COMPLETE POEMS OF  
**Emily Dickinson**

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1960

Wouldn't the Angels try me -  
Just - once - more -  
Just - see - if I troubled them -  
But don't - shut the door!

Oh, if I - were the Gentleman  
In the "White Robe" -  
And they - were the little Hand - that knocked -  
Could - I - forbid?

c. 1861

249

Wild Nights - Wild Nights!  
Were I with thee  
Wild Nights should be  
Our luxury!

Futile - the Winds -  
To a Heart in port -  
Done with the Compass -  
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -  
Ah, the Sea!  
Might I but moor - Tonight -  
In Thee!

c. 1861

250

I shall keep singing!  
Birds will pass me  
On their way to Yellower Climes -  
Each - with a Robin's expectation -  
I - with my Redbreast -  
And my Rhymes -

Late - when I take my place in summer -  
But - I shall bring a fuller tune -

[ 114 ]

Vespers - are sweeter than Matins - Signor -  
Morning - only the seed of Noon -

1935

1861

251

Over the fence -  
Strawberries - grow -  
Over the fence -  
I could climb - if I tried, I know -  
Berries are nice!

But - if I stained my Apron -  
God would certainly scold!  
Oh, dear, - I guess if He were a Boy -  
He'd - climb - if He could!

1945

c. 1861

252

I can wade Grief -  
Whole Pools of it -  
I'm used to that -  
But the least push of Joy  
Breaks up my feet -  
And I tip - drunken -  
Let no Pebble - smile -  
'Twas the New Liquor -  
That was all!

Power is only Pain -  
Stranded, thro' Discipline,  
Till Weights - will hang -  
Give Balm - to Giants -  
And they'll wilt, like Men -  
Give Himmaleh -  
They'll Carry - Him!

1891

c. 1861

[ 115 ]

Would suit as bright,  
Except that flight  
Were Aliment –

“If it would last”  
I asked the East,  
When that Bent Stripe  
Struck up my childish  
Firmament –  
And I, for glee,  
Took Rainbows, as the common way,  
And empty Skies  
The Eccentricity –

And so with Lives –  
And so with Butterflies –  
Seen magic – through the fright  
That they will cheat the sight –  
And Dower latitudes far on –  
Some sudden morn –  
Our portion – in the fashion –  
Done –

c. 1861

258

There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons –  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference,  
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –  
'Tis the Seal Despair –  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air –

[ 118 ]

When it comes, the Landscape listens –  
Shadows – hold their breath –  
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance  
On the look of Death –

1890

c. 1861

259

Good Night! Which put the Candle out?  
A jealous Zephyr – not a doubt –  
Ah, friend, you little knew  
How long at that celestial wick  
The Angels – labored diligent –  
Extinguished – now – for you!

It might – have been the Light House spark –  
Some Sailor – rowing in the Dark –  
Had importuned to see!  
It might – have been the waning lamp  
That lit the Drummer from the Camp  
To purer Reveille!

1891

c. 1861

260

Read – Sweet – how others – strove –  
Till we – are stouter –  
What they – renounced –  
Till we – are less afraid –  
How many times they – bore the faithful witness –  
Till we – are helped –  
As if a Kingdom – cared!

Read then – of faith –  
That shone above the fagot –  
Clear strains of Hymn  
The River could not drown –  
Brave names of Men –  
And Celestial Women –

[ 119 ]

The Tapestries of Paradise  
So notelessly – are made!

c. 1861

279

Tie the Strings to my Life, My Lord,  
Then, I am ready to go!  
Just a look at the Horses –  
Rapid! That will do!

Put me in on the firmest side –  
So I shall never fall –  
For we must ride to the Judgment –  
And it's partly, down Hill –

But never I mind the steepest –  
And never I mind the Sea –  
Held fast in Everlasting Race –  
By my own Choice, and Thee –

Goodbye to the Life I used to live –  
And the World I used to know –  
And kiss the Hills, for me, just once –  
Then – I am ready to go!

c. 1861

280

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,  
A Service, like a Drum –  
Kept beating – beating – till I thought  
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul

[ 128 ]

1891

With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race  
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down –  
And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing – then –

c. 1861

1896

281

'Tis so appalling – it exhilarates –  
So over Horror, it half Captivates –  
The Soul stares after it, secure –  
A Sepulchre, fears frost, no more –

To scan a Ghost, is faint –  
But grappling, conquers it –  
How easy, Torment, now –  
Suspense kept sawing so –

The Truth, is Bald, and Cold –  
But that will hold –  
If any are not sure –  
We show them – prayer –  
But we, who know,  
Stop hoping, now –

Looking at Death, is Dying –  
Just let go the Breath –  
And not the pillow at your Cheek  
So Slumbereth –

Others, Can wrestle –  
Yours, is done –  
And so of Woe, bleak dreaded – come,  
It sets the Fright at liberty –

[ 129 ]

A Wife – at Daybreak I shall be –  
 Sunrise – Hast thou a Flag for me?  
 At Midnight, I am but a Maid,  
 How short it takes to make a Bride –  
 Then – Midnight, I have passed from thee  
 Unto the East, and Victory –

Midnight – Good Night! I hear them call,  
 The Angels bustle in the Hall –  
 Softly my Future climbs the Stair,  
 I fumble at my Childhood's prayer  
 So soon to be a Child no more –  
 Eternity, I'm coming – Sir,  
 Savior – I've seen the face – before!

c. 1862

1929

Why make it doubt – it hurts it so –  
 So sick – to guess –  
 So strong – to know –  
 So brave – upon its little Bed  
 To tell the very last They said  
 Unto Itself – and smile – And shake –  
 For that dear – distant – dangerous – Sake –  
 But – the Instead – the Pinching fear  
 That Something – it did do – or dare –  
 Offend the Vision – and it flee –  
 And They no more remember me –  
 Nor ever turn to tell me why –  
 Oh, Master, This is Misery –

c. 1862

1929

I live with Him – I see His face –  
 I go no more away

[ 222 ]

For Visitor – or Sundown –  
 Death's single privacy

The Only One – forestalling Mine –  
 And that – by Right that He  
 Presents a Claim invisible –  
 No wedlock – granted Me –

I live with Him – I hear His Voice –  
 I stand alive – Today –  
 To witness to the Certainty  
 Of Immortality –

Taught Me – by Time – the lower Way –  
 Conviction – Every day –  
 That Life like This – is stopless –  
 Be Judgment – what it may –

c. 1862

1896

The power to be true to You,  
 Until upon my face  
 The Judgment push His Picture –  
 Presumptuous of Your Place –  
 Of This – Could Man deprive Me –  
 Himself – the Heaven excel –  
 Whose invitation – Yours reduced  
 Until it showed too small –

c. 1862

1929

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –  
 The Stillness in the Room  
 Was like the Stillness in the Air –  
 Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –  
 And Breaths were gathering firm

[ 223 ]

For that last Onset – when the King  
Be witnessed – in the Room –

c. 1862

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away  
What portion of me be  
Assignable – and then it was  
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –  
Between the light – and me –  
And then the Windows failed – and then  
I could not see to see –

c. 1862

1896

466

'Tis little I – could care for Pearls –  
Who own the ample sea –  
Or Brooches – when the Emperor –  
With Rubies – pelteth me –

Or Gold – who am the Prince of Mines –  
Or Diamonds – when have I  
A Diadem to fit a Dome –  
Continual upon me –

c. 1862

c. 1862

1896

467

We do not play on Graves –  
Because there isn't Room –  
Besides – it isn't even – it slants  
And People come –

And put a Flower on it –  
And hang their faces so –  
We're fearing that their Hearts will drop –  
And crush our pretty play –

And so we move as far  
As Enemies – away –

[ 224 ]

Just looking round to see how far  
It is – Occasionally –

1945

468

The Manner of its Death  
When Certain it must die –  
'Tis deemed a privilege to choose –  
'Twas Major André's Way –

When Choice of Life – is past –  
There yet remains a Love  
Its little Fate to stipulate –

How small in those who live –

The Miracle to tease  
With Babble of the styles –  
How "they are Dying mostly – now" –  
And Customs at "St. James"!

1945

469

The Red – Blaze – is the Morning –  
The Violet – is Noon –  
The Yellow – Day – is falling –  
And after that – is none –

But Miles of Sparks – at Evening –  
Reveal the Width that burned –  
The Territory Argent – that  
Never yet – consumed –

1945

c. 1862

470

I am alive – I guess –  
The Branches on my Hand

[ 225 ]

Nor like Himself – the Art  
Upon the Window Pane  
To gad my little Being out –  
And not begin – again –

c. 1862

613

They shut me up in Prose –  
As when a little Girl  
They put me in the Closet –  
Because they liked me “still” –  
Still! Could themselves have peeped –  
And seen my Brain – go round –  
They might as wise have lodged a Bird  
For Treason – in the Pound –  
Himself has but to will  
And easy as a Star  
Abolish his Captivity –  
And laugh – No more have I –

c. 1862

614

In falling Timbers buried –  
There breathed a Man –  
Outside – the spades – were plying –  
The Lungs – within –  
Could He – know – they sought Him –  
Could They – know – He breathed –  
Horrid Sand Partition –  
Neither – could be heard –  
Never slacked the Diggers –  
But when Spades had done –  
Oh, Reward of Anguish,  
It was dying – Then –

[ 302 ]

1945

c. 1862

Many Things – are fruitless –  
'Tis a Baffling Earth –  
But there is no Gratitude  
Like the Grace – of Death –

1945

615

Our journey had advanced –  
Our feet were almost come  
To that odd Fork in Being's Road –  
Eternity – by Term –  
Our pace took sudden awe –  
Our feet – reluctant – led –  
Before – were Cities – but Between –  
The Forest of the Dead –  
Retreat – was out of Hope –  
Behind – a Sealed Route –  
Eternity's White Flag – Before –  
And God – at every Gate –

1891

c. 1862

616

I rose – because He sank –  
I thought it would be opposite –  
But when his power dropped –  
My Soul grew straight.  
I cheered my fainting Prince –  
I sang firm – even – Chants –  
I helped his Film – with Hymn –  
And when the Dews drew off  
That held his Forehead stiff –  
I met him –  
Balm to Balm –  
I told him Best – must pass  
Through this low Arch of Flesh –

[ 303 ]

c. 1862

Nor We so much as check our speech –  
Nor stop to cross Ourselves –

631

Ourselves were wed one summer – dear –  
Your Vision – was in June –  
And when Your little Lifetime failed,  
I wearied – too – of mine –

And overtaken in the Dark –  
Where You had put me down –  
By Some one carrying a Light –  
I – too – received the Sign.

'Tis true – Our Futures different lay –  
Your Cottage – faced the sun –  
While Oceans – and the North must be –  
On every side of mine

'Tis true, Your Garden led the Bloom,  
For mine – in Frosts – was sown –  
And yet, one Summer, we were Queens –  
But You – were crowned in June –

c. 1862

632

The Brain – is wider than the Sky –  
For – put them side by side –  
The one the other will contain  
With ease – and You – beside –

The Brain is deeper than the sea –  
For – hold them – Blue to Blue –  
The one the other will absorb –  
As Sponges – Buckets – do –

The Brain is just the weight of God –  
For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –

[ 312 ]

1945

c. 1862

And they will differ – if they do –  
As Syllable from Sound –

1896

633

When Bells stop ringing – Church – begins –  
The Positive – of Bells –  
When Cogs – stop – that's Circumference –  
The Ultimate – of Wheels.

c. 1862

1945

634

You'll know Her – by Her Foot –  
The smallest Gamboge Hand  
With Fingers – where the Toes should be –  
Would more affront the Sand –

Than this Quaint Creature's Boot –  
Adjusted by a Stem –  
Without a Button – I could vouch –  
Unto a Velvet Limb –

You'll know Her – by Her Vest –  
Tight fitting – Orange – Brown –  
Inside a Jacket duller –  
She wore when she was born –

Her Cap is small – and snug –  
Constructed for the Winds –  
She'd pass for Barehead – short way off –  
But as She Closer stands –

So finer 'tis than Wool –  
You cannot feel the Seam –  
Nor is it Clasped unto of Band –  
Nor held upon – of Brim –

You'll know Her – by Her Voice –  
At first – a doubtful Tone –

[ 313 ]



654

A long – long Sleep – A famous – Sleep –  
That makes no show for Morn –  
By Stretch of Limb – or stir of Lid –  
An independent One –

Was ever idleness like This?  
Upon a Bank of Stone  
To bask the Centuries away –  
Nor once look up – for Noon?

c. 1862

1896

655

Without this – there is nought –  
All other Riches be  
As is the Twitter of a Bird –  
Heard opposite the Sea –

I could not care – to gain  
A lesser than the Whole –  
For did not this include itself –  
As Seams – include the Ball?

I wished a way might be  
My Heart to subdivide –  
’Twould magnify – the Gratitude –  
And not reduce – the Gold –

c. 1862

1935

656

The name – of it – is “Autumn” –  
The hue – of it – is Blood –  
An Artery – upon the Hill –  
A Vein – along the Road –

Great Globules – in the Alleys –  
And Oh, the Shower of Stain –  
When Winds – upset the Basin –  
And spill the Scarlet Rain –

[ 326 ]

It sprinkles Bonnets – far below –  
It gathers ruddy Pools –  
Then – eddies like a Rose – away –  
Upon Vermilion Wheels –

1892

c. 1862

657

I dwell in Possibility –  
A fairer House than Prose –  
More numerous of Windows –  
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –  
Impregnable of Eye –  
And for an Everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –  
For Occupation – This –  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise –

c. 1862

1929

658

Whole Gulfs – of Red, and Fleets – of Red –  
And Crews – of solid Blood –  
Did place about the West – Tonight –  
As ’twere specific Ground –

And They – appointed Creatures –  
In Authorized Arrays –  
Due – promptly – as a Drama –  
That bows – and disappears –

c. 1862

1945

659

That first Day, when you praised Me, Sweet,  
And said that I was strong –

[ 327 ]

c. 1863

How powerful the Stimulus  
Of an Hermetic Mind -

712

Because I could not stop for Death -  
He kindly stopped for me -  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves -  
And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For His Civility -

We passed the School, where Children strove  
At Recess - in the Ring -  
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain -  
We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed Us -  
The Dews drew quivering and chill -  
For only Gossamer, my Gown -  
My Tippet - only Tulle -

We paused before a House that seemed  
A Swelling of the Ground -  
The Roof was scarcely visible -  
The Cornice - in the Ground -

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet  
Feels shorter than the Day  
I first surmised the Horses' Heads  
Were toward Eternity -

c. 1863

713

Fame of Myself, to justify,  
All other Plaudit be

[ 350 ]

1929

c. 1863

714

Rests at Night  
The Sun from shining,  
Nature - and some Men -  
Rest at Noon - some Men -  
While Nature  
And the Sun - go on -

c. 1863

715

The World - feels Dusty  
When We stop to Die -  
We want the Dew - then -  
Honors - taste dry -

Flags - vex a Dying face -  
But the least Fan  
Stirred by a friend's Hand -  
Cools - like the Rain -

Mine be the Ministry  
When thy Thirst comes -  
And Hybla Balms -  
Dews of Thessaly, to fetch -

c. 1863

716

The Day undressed - Herself -  
Her Garter - was of Gold -

[ 351 ]

Superfluous - An Incense  
Beyond Necessity -

Fame of Myself to lack - Although  
My Name be else Supreme -  
This were an Honor honorless -  
A futile Diadem -

1945

1945

1929

Looking on – is the Department  
Of its Audience –  
But Transaction – is assisted  
By no Countenance –

c. 1863

751

My Worthiness is all my Doubt –  
His Merit – all my fear –  
Contrasting which, my quality  
Do lowlier – appear –

Lest I should insufficient prove  
For His beloved Need –  
The Chiefest Apprehension  
Upon my thronging Mind –

'Tis true – that Deity to stoop  
Inherently incline –  
For nothing higher than Itself  
Itself can rest upon –

So I – the undivine abode  
Of His Elect Content –  
Conform my Soul – as 'twere a Church,  
Unto Her Sacrament –

c. 1863

752

So the Eyes accost – and sunder  
In an Audience –  
Stamped – occasionally – forever –  
So may Countenance

Entertain – without addressing  
Countenance of One  
In a Neighboring Horizon –  
Gone – as soon as known –

c. 1863

[ 368 ]

753

My Soul – accused me – And I quailed –  
As Tongues of Diamond had reviled  
All else accused me – and I smiled –  
My Soul – that Morning – was My friend –

Her favor – is the best Disdain  
Toward Artifice of Time – or Men –  
But Her Disdain – 'twere lighter bear  
A finger of Enamelled Fire –

1929

c. 1863

754

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –  
In Corners – till a Day  
The Owner passed – identified –  
And carried Me away –

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –  
And now We hunt the Doe –  
And every time I speak for Him –  
The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light  
Upon the Valley glow –  
It is as a Vesuvian face  
Had let its pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –  
I guard My Master's Head –  
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's  
Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –  
None stir the second time –  
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –  
Or an emphatic Thumb –

Though I than He – may longer live  
He longer must – than I –

[ 369 ]

1929

1896

1929

For I have but the power to kill,  
Without – the power to die –

c. 1863

1929

755

No Bobolink – reverse His Singing  
When the only Tree  
Ever He minded occupying  
By the Farmer be –

Clove to the Root –  
His Spacious Future –  
Best Horizon – gone –  
Whose Music be His  
Only Anodyne –  
Brave Bobolink –

c. 1863

1945

756

One Blessing had I than the rest  
So larger to my Eyes  
That I stopped gauging – satisfied –  
For this enchanted size –

It was the limit of my Dream –  
The focus of my Prayer –  
A perfect – paralyzing Bliss –  
Contented as Despair –

I knew no more of Want – or Cold –  
Phantasms both become  
For this new Value in the Soul –  
Supremest Earthly Sum –

The Heaven below the Heaven above –  
Obscured with ruddier Blue –  
Life's Latitudes leant over – full –  
The Judgment perished – too –

[ 370 ]

Why Bliss so scantily disburse –  
Why Paradise defer –  
Why Floods be served to Us – in Bowls –  
I speculate no more –

1896

c. 1863

757

The Mountains – grow unnoticed –  
Their Purple figures rise  
Without attempt – Exhaustion –  
Assistance – or Applause –

In Their Eternal Faces  
The Sun – with just delight  
Looks long – and last – and golden –  
For fellowship – at night –

1929

c. 1863

758

These – saw Visions –  
Latch them softly –  
These – held Dimples –  
Smooth them slow –  
This – addressed departing accents –  
Quick – Sweet Mouth – to miss thee so –

This – We stroked –  
Unnumbered Satin –  
These – we held among our own –  
Fingers of the Slim Aurora –  
Not so arrogant – this Noon –

These – adjust – that ran to meet us –  
Pearl – for Stocking – Pearl for Shoe –  
Paradise – the only Palace  
Fit for Her reception – now –

1935

c. 1863

[ 371 ]

For the suspended Candidate  
There came unsummoned in -

That portion of the Vision  
The Word applied to fill  
Not unto nomination  
The Cherubim reveal -

c. 1868

1127

Soft as the massacre of Suns  
By Evening's Sabres slain

c. 1868

1128

These are the Nights that Beetles love -  
From Eminence remote  
Drives ponderous perpendicular  
His figure intimate  
The terror of the Children  
The merriment of men  
Depositing his Thunder  
He hoists abroad again -  
A Bomb upon the Ceiling  
Is an improving thing -  
It keeps the nerves progressive  
Conjecture flourishing -  
Too dear the Summer evening  
Without discreet alarm -  
Supplied by Entomology  
With its remaining charm -

c. 1868

1129

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant -  
Success in Circuit lies  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise

[ 506 ]

As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind  
The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind -

1945

c. 1868

1945

1130

That odd old man is dead a year -  
We miss his stated Hat.  
'Twas such an evening bright and stiff  
His faded lamp went out.

Who miss his antiquated Wick -  
Are any hoar for him?  
Waits any indurated mate  
His wrinkled coming Home?

Oh Life, begun in fluent Blood  
And consummated dull!  
Achievement contemplating thee -  
Feels transitive and cool.

1945

c. 1868

1131

The Merchant of the Picturesque  
A Counter has and sales  
But is within or negative  
Precisely as the calls -  
To Children he is small in price  
And large in courtesy -  
It suits him better than a check  
Their artless currency -  
Of Counterfeits he is so shy  
Do one advance so near  
As to behold his ample flight -

1945

c. 1868  
(unfinished)

[ 507 ]